

WARRANT COMMITTEE FY07 MEETING MINUTES
FINAL
MAY 16, 2007, 7:30 P.M.
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM

Meeting was called to order at 7:33 by Chair Jones.

Present: Chair Jones; Members Allison, Brusch, Callanan, Curtis, Doblin, Hobbs, Paolillo, Tillotson, White, and Widmer; Town Administrator Younger, Town Accountant Hagg, Town Treasurer Carmen; BOS Member Solomon; School Committee Chair Bowe

Absent: Members Christensen, Heigham, Hofmann, Oates; Assistant Town Administrator Conti; BOS Chair Firenze

Minutes Approved for 5-2-07 and 5-9-07

Chair Jones began the meeting by turning to the minutes of May 2 and May 9. After corrections were made, the May 2 minutes were approved with 2 abstentions, and the May 9 minutes were approved with 4 abstentions.

Open Meeting Law Seminar Chair Jones noted that the WC should be aware of what came out of the "Open Meeting Law Seminar" on the previous Thursday (5/10/2007). For example, if a committee receives an email, the receipt of said email constitutes a meeting. Don't hit "return to all," said Jones, it could be in violation. This applies to the Minutes as well. Town Administrator Younger clarified that if the email is about scheduling a meeting, it's ok to hit "reply to all" - but if it's substantive, don't hit reply to all. Member Paolillo asked: Are you saying we can't have an email exchange on an issue without violating public law? It was clarified that you can't discuss, deliberate, or write language of a substantive nature in emails. Member Hobbs requested that Lisa Gibalerio [WC Recording Secretary] print "FINAL" on the final set of minutes that are sent out to WC members.

Reserve Fund Transfer of \$5K for Professional Services Chair Jones stated that BOS Chair Firenze had met with the Community Development Planning office regarding the need for \$5K to fund new sewer inspections at McLean. Jones offered that this money could be appropriated at the June 18 Town Meeting. Member Brusch said that we would need to call a special Town Meeting to get authorization to use those funds in the current fiscal year. Chair Jones moved to authorize a special reserve fund transfer of \$5K for Professional Services. The motion was seconded, and all were in favor, with one abstention.

Reserve Fund Transfer Request from the Council on Aging Town Administrator Younger addressed the Reserve Fund Transfer request from the Council on Aging. Younger explained that the lease agreement (i.e., for Our Lady's) reads that if at any time the property was no longer of a religious nature and is operated on behalf of the Town, then the Town would pay the property taxes on the properties. The money comes out of an overlay account initially proposed for this purpose. Member Brusch offered that for next year's budget, \$20K be put as an expenditure, and put another \$20K in revenues - so it's a wash. We should anticipate the property tax issue for next year, she said.

A motion was made, seconded, and all were in favor of the reserve fund transfer request of \$40,893.07. Only \$20,000 of this is for the current year taxes.

Subcommittee Reports Recreation Commission Member Allison distributed a handout and began her summary: there is not a lot of change on the budget side, the increases are in line with the Town, and there are no major changes in staffing. Allison proposed to focus on three specific areas. The first area concerns the fact that the Recreation Department operates with an ongoing

deficit, which requires a substantial town subsidy. There are some allocation issues, but the DPW costs are probably in the range of \$400-450K. The subsidy question will need to be examined, she said, if a hard discussion of core functions is required. A second and related issue is breadth of offerings and number of new activities introduced compared with comparable towns. Winchester is a good example. Winchester works on a revolving-fund basis and is break-even - it offers new course after new course, yet is still able to break even. This deserves some study, Allison noted. The third area concerns two major facilities, Underwood Pool and the rink. The Underwood Pool is the more critical. It is likely that the pool will fail in the near future. Recreation Department management has stated that they do not believe the money to rebuild can be raised privately. The issue, Allison continued, is that the next time the pool fails, \$175-225K will be required to resurface the pool. "Before we spend that money, we should make a decision about replacement," noted Allison.

A short discussion ensued regarding Winchester's programs. Allison explained that she examined only 5-10 programs and the fees of those are comparable to Belmont's. Winchester does have an academically focused adult education department. There are Adult Education programs offered in Belmont through the School department that appear to be similar. Winchester's Adult Education tends to be more academic. SC Chair Bowe asked with whom we should plan about the pool - who owns the pool? Is it Recreation or general government? Member Brusch stated that the tennis courts are under the Recreation Commission and that they are in deplorable condition [4 sets in town]. "Who's going to pay to repair the tennis courts?" Brusch asked. Town Administrator Younger also asked: What are the town's core services? Is it the pool? The tennis courts? The rink involves the schools and is less ambiguous. Member Paolillo wondered then about the \$535K in the Recreation Department's budget. Allison replied that maintenance is not included in the \$535K budget, but the issue with the pool is that, to provide a temporary fix, it will cost \$225K. There is no provision for repair or replacing when the pool fails. Member Doblin said that the pool adds to the quality of this town and that the voters need to be checked in with on this issue. "We need to get a price and take it to the voters," said Doblin. Member Allison agreed, but worried about the following scenario: The pool fails its inspection, we pay \$225K to do a quick fix, then the town rejects the \$4M override to rebuild the pool - then we've just thrown away \$225K on the quick fix. Doblin agreed with the likelihood of that scenario.

Member Callanan offered: "In the summertime, those families who can't afford to get away, or to send their children to camps, have so enjoyed the pool. It [the pool] definitely adds to the quality of the town, and voters need some input. It comes down to making really hard choices, which requires educating the town." BOS Member Solomon said that the BOS may want to talk with the Recreation Commission about these issues. The BOS has final responsibility in spending money. The issue of what the town wants and is willing to pay for will have to come out, he said.

Precinct 4 Town Meeting Member Anne Mahon (from the audience) posited that people care a great deal about the pool and that if they knew the pool was at risk of closing, they'd organize major fund-raising efforts to help pay for it. Many, many families use this pool, she said, and it has the historical honor of being the first public pool in the nation.

Library Report

Member Tillotson distributed a draft handout. One of the biggest challenges the library faces, he said, is finding new and creative ways to provide services, and to prioritize the services that they currently provide. In addition, fiscal creativity will remain necessary for the foreseeable future. Regarding staffing, the library trustees should be looking to more innovative models to deliver its services. Reviewing and possibly renegotiating the staffing and contractual arrangements would give the library greater flexibility and may offer the community more convenience. Last year, Tillotson continued, the library successfully accomplished many of its goals including: developing a new print management system, filling 5 vacant positions, and adding Russian, Chinese, and

Japanese to its bilingual collection as well as continued support for Belmont students in their school needs.

Chair Jones agreed that collective bargaining may help the library with personnel issues and that they would do well to restructure. Jones has advised them seek help in these matters from Diane Crimmins. Member Allison noted that a large number of Library employees retired last year, allowing for a good opportunity to restructure their service delivery. There is some disappointment that when the opportunity presented itself to do so, they didn't rethink some of their services, she said. Jones noted again that the Library trustees could use some assistance in the area of personnel.

FY08 Budget Chair Jones noted that there are two handouts: The "Cuts/Adds" report from Town Accountant Hagg, and a Forecasting report from Member White. Jones asked if Member White's numbers "tie out" with Town Accountant Hagg's latest cuts/adds report? Town Accountant Hagg replied yes, to last week's bottom line, but it is not impacted significantly to this week's, which does include the SC's decision last night. [See below for more details on this.] Regarding the operating deficit, Chair Jones said it may be necessary to go into executive session to discuss the cost reduction number of \$516K. Member Curtis said it would be useful to look at removing the \$516K from the budget, and see what the impact to the budget would be. Jones added that something has to be reduced and the WC will need to discuss what that something is, as there are lots of options. SC Chair Bowe explained that at last night's meeting, the SC decided to not move forward with full-day Kindergarten. "The money just isn't there," said Bowe. The SC also dropped the Director of Guidance and Assessment, but did include the shared network administrator position (shared with the town, \$30K each) and the School Resource Officer (also shared with the town, \$22K each). Chair Jones asked about the process of the Home Rule petition for Belmont, which will allow for funding retirees' other post employment benefits (OPEB). Member Widmer answered that it was moving forward at state level. If it doesn't pass, Member Bruschi said, it will be put in a town stabilization fund. Treasurer Carmen said that this is a long-term liability which will have to be addressed at some point. Town Accountant Hagg opined that the Special Purpose Stabilization Fund which could accumulate for this liability, although a worthwhile endeavor, would not count towards OPEB unless such funds were in an irrevocable trust.

Executive Session

Chair Jones moved to go into Executive Session at 8:37 to discuss collective bargaining. He stated that the WC will return to open session to continue the budget conversation. A roll call vote was taken: all WC Members voted Aye. SC Chair Bowe requested that the bargaining committee of the SC be allowed to participate [Kathy Miller and Elizabeth Gibson approached the WC table], and Treasurer Carmen was invited to stay for the discussion as well. BOS Member Solomon motioned to come out of Executive Session at 9:55, and return to open session. The motion was seconded and the WC unanimously agreed. Chair Jones stated that Executive Session will commence at 7:30 next week to continue the subject of collective bargaining. After that meeting, the WC will return to open session for substantive discussions on the budget.

Closing

All Committee Chairs were reminded to submit their reports for the WC Town meeting book to Barbara Hagg.

Member Widmer motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:00 pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
Recording Secretary